# GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETINS

*Published Weekly by*

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

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General Headquarters, Washington, D. C.

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*Photograph by Capt. A. W. Stevens*

**FLORIDA CANAL WILL BEGIN AT JACKSONVILLE**

This busy port at the mouth of the St. Johns River will be busier still when the new short cut from the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico is completed (see Bulletin No. 2).

**HOW TEACHERS MAY OBTAIN THE BULLETINS**

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## Eritrea: Italy's 50-Year-Old Colony on the Red Sea

THE recent outbreak of hostilities near the Ethiopian border of Eritrea draws attention to that Italian country on the west coast of the Red Sea.

"What is now Eritrea began in 1870," writes Harald P. Lechenperg in a communication to the Washington, D. C., headquarters of the National Geographic Society, "when the Italian Rubattino Steamship Company needed a coaling station in the Red Sea and bought the Bay of Assab and its miserable oasis from a petty local ruler, the Sultan of Raheita.

"By 1879 a small Italian military force had landed in Assab and hoisted the Italian flag in this corner of the world. To-day, that red, white, and green banner flies over a strip of Red Sea coast which is 670 miles long. Inland from Assab across the desert, rise the cool highlands of Ethiopia (see accompanying map supplement).

"Torrid, barren, and fever-stricken is the coast that stretches northwest from Assab, but as you approach the port of Massaua the topography begins to change. Behind Massaua the green highlands rise in steep embankments, forming a sort of gateway to the interior of Africa.

"It was when Italy occupied Massaua in 1885 that Eritrea took definite shape; now the area ruled by Italy stretches inland in some places 220 miles or more to the frontiers of Ethiopia and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

"In brief, within twenty years after the Rubattino Company bought Assab as a coaling station which was never developed, Italy's colony here had come to cover nearly 46,000 square miles of Africa. On January 1, 1890, this new colony was christened Eritrea by the Italian Government, in remembrance of the 'Mare Erythraeum,' as the old Romans called the waters of this part of the world.

### One of Hottest Places In the World

"I journeyed from Assab to Massaua and until then I had never really known what heat was," says the author. "Even a day-long crocodile hunt in India, with the thermometer at 117 degrees Fahrenheit, was cooler than a walk through Massaua, where in summer the thermometer often hits 120 in the shade. The short stroll from the small post-steamer landing, over the shadeless pier of the new harbor grounds to the Hotel Savoia, proved a feat of physical endurance!

"'Yes, we have veritable hell here in summer,' said the tired hotel manager. 'Even in winter Massaua is no pleasure resort; but then you can at least endure it.'

"Yet Massaua, one of the hottest cities in the world, with its environs, normally is the home of 15,000 natives and a few hundred Europeans. The white men, mostly Italians, work during the day in their offices under big fans, with glasses of cool water on their desks. In a damp and steamy air, they toil with a mean temperature for July of 94 degrees Fahrenheit, 20 degrees hotter than the average for the hottest month in New York.

"Only by constant work can the white man stand the climate and forget the heat. No idle man could endure it here. Except for a few nurses in the hospital, no white women live in Massaua in summer. Then, the families of white employees go to the high plain of Hamasien, the real center of Eritrea.

"The harbor of Massaua is the only place in Eritrea where large ships can tie up at docks to discharge their passengers and cargo. For this reason it is here that the landing of Italian troops and war materials has been taking place.

"Eritrea, in the main, is composed of three different parts. First of all, there is the long coast line of the Red Sea, with its hot climate and its scanty vegetation. The people here are largely Arabs, who, when not occupied with the Red Sea and its produce, engage in small-scale cattle breeding.

"The bulk of Eritrea is that high plateau which stretches southward into Ethiopian country. This plateau, with its average elevation of nearly 7,000 feet, has a cool climate with ample rain in summer. The people here are Hamitic, partly with a slight Semitic or Negroid touch.

"While this high basaltic plateau falls off steeply to the Red Sea, the other side—the west—slopes more gradually to the border of the Sudan plain. These rolling inclines make up the third section of Eritrea."

Note: See also "With the Italians in Eritrea," *National Geographic Magazine*, September, 1935; "An Unbeliever Joins the Hadj," June, 1934; and "Three-Wheeling Through Africa," January, 1934.

**Bulletin No. 1, October 21, 1935.**

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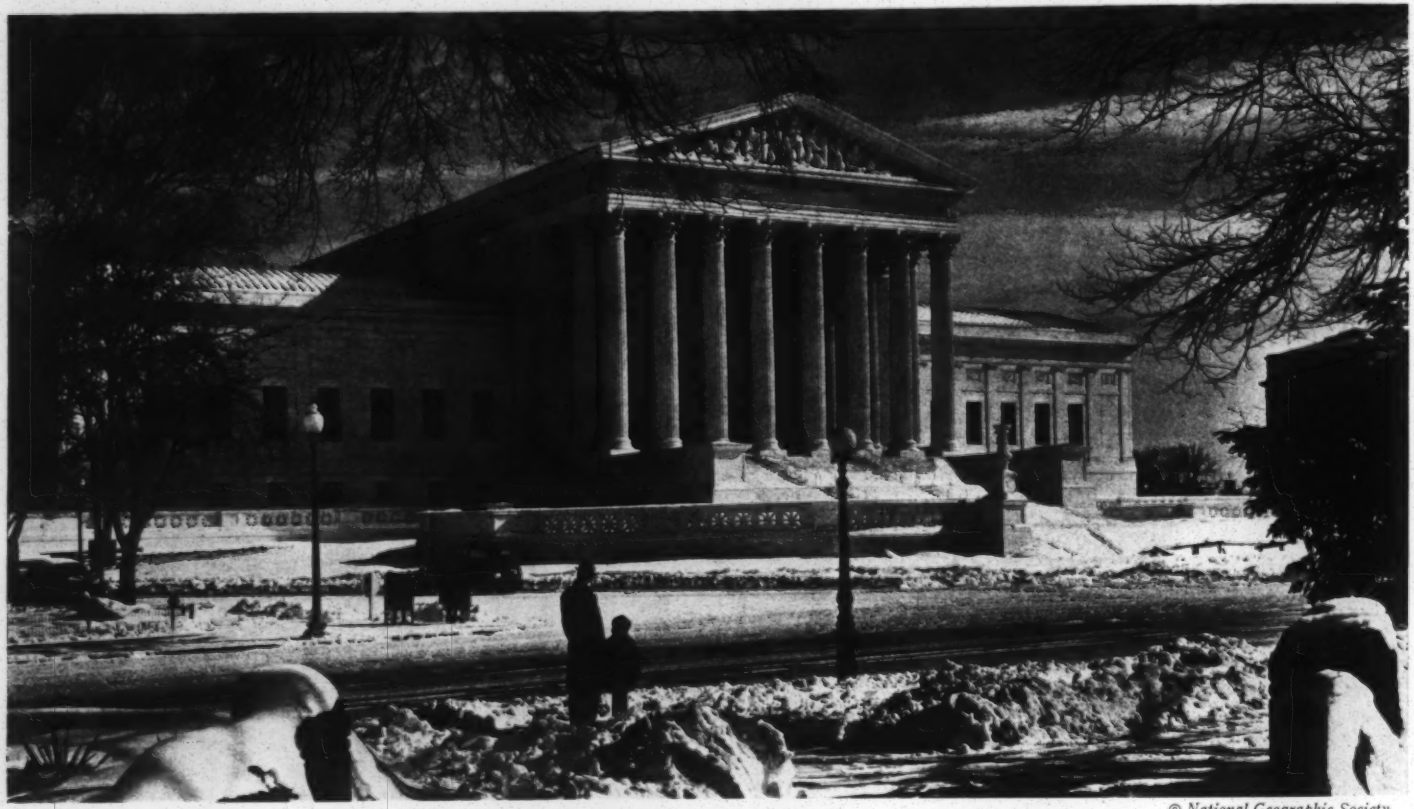

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**THE NEW SUPREME COURT BUILDING IS A GLEAMING MARBLE TEMPLE**

**The exterior is of Vermont marble; Georgia marble lines the four inner courtyards; the marble for the lofty halls came from Alabama; while Italy and Spain have contributed a small amount for the courtroom. The building faces the Capitol, and beside it may be seen a corner of the Library of Congress (see Bulletin No. 3).**

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## New Ship Canal to Invade Florida Forests

CONSTRUCTION work has been started on America's newest ship canal. Steam shovels are chugging where helmeted Spaniards once pushed through silent, tangled jungles in search of the Fountain of Youth, and eventually tall masts may mingle with the tall pines in Florida's northern forests.

If the canal is completed as planned, squat freighters, proud passenger liners, and even grim war craft from the seven seas will steam through inland waters on which in bygone days keen-eyed Indians paddled primitive canoes.

### Canal Will Follow Three Rivers

Furnishing a convenient short cut for vessels between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the canal is designed to utilize the channels of three picturesque Florida rivers—the St. Johns, the Ocklawaha and the Withlacoochee. Therefore, although the transpeninsular waterway will be nearly 200 miles long, less than half its length will have to be dug by human agencies. Mother Nature, the great engineer, already has excavated a large proportion herself. Boats have plied for many years on all three rivers, and the canal simply will connect and deepen them.

Like the 100-mile waterway at Suez, the Florida Canal will be a sea-level route, with none of the huge locks and mountain-slicing "cuts" necessary at Panama. Canal-building is comparatively easy in Florida, for the highest point in the peninsula is less than two-thirds the height of the Washington Monument, and most of the State is only a few feet above the ocean.

From the Atlantic, ships will enter the canal at bustling, versatile Jacksonville, whose exports range from pine boards to ground oyster shells, the latter to aid chickens' digestions! Jacksonville, only 25 miles from Florida's northern border, is the State's largest city, its industrial center, and a leading lumber shipping point.

Through this city, the gateway to Florida's vast winter playground, a huge traffic rolls down to Miami Beach on the east and St. Petersburg on the west coasts, and to other southern resorts when winter's first chills occur "up north." In some years this "sun-worshipper" travel has reached as high as a motor car a minute.

### Palatka Is Busy River Port

From Jacksonville south, ocean vessels already navigate 64 miles of what is planned to be part of the canal route. This is the St. Johns River, which strangely enough in so flat a region, flows due north 125 miles before reaching the sea.

A sluggish stream—it drops only 70 feet in 100 miles—the St. Johns carries a large water-borne commerce to Jacksonville. The river flows between banks made colorful by jasmine, oleanders, live oaks, and great palms whose smooth trunks rise high above the other foliage. At a retreat on its shores, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote part of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

Palatka, busy little shipping center on the upper St. Johns, is now the head of navigation for ocean vessels. Palatka's lumber piles, seen from the air, resemble a city in themselves, and the city boasts what is believed to be the only camphor plantation in the United States. Camphor gum is extracted from the plants' leaves and twigs. Farther upstream, near Welaka, the new canal will turn southwestward along the narrow, winding course of the Ocklawaha River, a tributary of the St. Johns.

So winding is the Ocklawaha that a boat navigating it actually moves toward



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## Special Supplementary Map of Ethiopia

ACCOMPANYING this issue of the GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETINS as a supplement is a large-size map of Ethiopia and surrounding territory. The map was first published in the *National Geographic Magazine* for September, 1935, accompanying articles by Harald P. Lechenperg, entitled "With the Italians in Eritrea," and by Leo B. Roberts, on "Traveling in the Highlands of Ethiopia." The map provides teachers and students with a detailed and up-to-date reference map of the entire African war zone. It is also a last-minute report on the correct spelling and exact location of the many strange place names appearing in the daily news.

The enclosed map makes an interesting appendix to The Society's new map of Africa, in ten colors, 29½ by 31 inches, published last June. This invaluable map of the world's second largest continent shows all recent boundary readjustments, altered political divisions, new railway routes, and highways. Engraved upon a single sheet is an encyclopedia of geographic information about modern Africa. Copies, priced at fifty cents on paper, and one dollar on linen, may be ordered from the National Geographic Society's headquarters, Washington, D. C. An index to the 7,162 place names on the map has been published separately, and is priced at twenty-five cents a copy.

The next map in the long series of The Society's contributions to cartography will be a new Map of the World, to appear as a supplement to the December issue of the *National Geographic Magazine*. Printed in full color, it will show the world in two hemispheres, and will include railways and airlines of international importance, boundary changes, official native spellings, and recent discoveries in Antarctica, Baffin Island, Greenland, and Australia. It is the result of a year's careful research by The Society's cartographers.

Among other maps published recently by The Society are the following: Europe and the Near East, 1929; Antarctic Regions, 1932; United States, 1933; Asia, 1933; Caribbean Countries, 1934. An index has been compiled for each of these maps except the Antarctic Regions. Each map is priced at fifty cents on paper and seventy-five cents on linen, and the index is twenty-five cents.

A complete list of the maps, books and other publications of the National Geographic Society will be furnished upon request.

*Photograph by Harald P. Lechenperg*

**WITH FEVERISH HASTE ERITREANS MIX CEMENT AS ITALIANS RUSH WAR PLANS**

**In the background rises the skeleton steel frame of some new structure, astonishing in this empty part of Africa. Hangars and airports are being built rapidly, for the use of military airplanes arriving from Italy.**

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## Modern Temple of Justice

THE Supreme Court of the United States opened its fall term this month in its new and glistening marble home on Capitol Hill.

Everything about the new Supreme Court Building is on a majestic scale, but so perfect are the proportions, so simple the design, that it gives an impression of delicate poise rather than massive weight. From the steps of the Capitol, looking across First Street, one sees its low wings and pure Corinthian portico framed by elms. A wide marble terrace encircles the building, and from it broad steps lead to the entrance.

Giant blocks of marble, the heaviest ever brought to Washington, stand on each side of these stairs. Each block weighs 45 tons. The sliding bronze doors are rather heavy, too. They weigh 3,000 pounds apiece! Scenes in bas-relief show the progress of human justice from ancient Greece and Rome, and England at the time of the granting of the Magna Carta, to America and the rise of the power of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall (see illustration, next page).

### Old Chairs and Crimson Velvet

Inside these portals a main hall lined with thirty-six stately columns—each made from one solid piece of stone—leads to the courtroom where the nine black-robed Justices sit. At their own request the room was made only about 60 per cent larger in floor area than the old Supreme Court room in the Capitol. At the rear of the room, against a background of deep red velvet, are nine chairs of various ages and designs, according to the individual preferences of the Justices. Their occupants have become used to them, and they will probably not be changed.

The Supreme Court does not wish to become a spectacle, so there will never be room for a very large audience on the carved wooden benches that fill the floor space. Before the Justices are seats for one hundred and two members of the bar, and back of them one hundred and eighty visitors may be seated. Light from court-yard windows streams into the room on each side, softened by long velvet hangings of regal crimson. Heavy bronze grills close the corridor entrances.

### Spacious Offices for Justices

Behind the courtroom are the quartered-oak-paneled offices of the Justices, each of whom will have about as much space as all had together in the crowded Capitol. To assure them privacy, the corridors can be closed by big bronze gates.

The Attorney General and Solicitor General, who had barely space enough for their briefcases when they came to the Capitol to appear before the Court, are provided with spacious offices.

Two circular staircases of white marble spiral upward from the basement to the third floor. On this floor is the oak-paneled public reading room and special library accommodating some 90,000 volumes. Further stack rooms are on the fourth floor, and the main law library is on the second floor.

Under the courtyards are garages; out of sight is apparatus for conditioning the air in most parts of the building; there are dining rooms for the Justices and a cafeteria for visitors.

The site which the building occupies is an historic one. Early patriots in powdered wigs foregathered at a famous old hotel run by William Tunnicliff on



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all points of the compass along its meandering length. The Ocklawaha flows considerable distances through cypress swamps whose huge trees are bearded with Spanish moss, among giant palmettos whose branchless trunks rise 50 or 60 feet, water maples, pink almonds, jasmine and rhododendron.

Much of the country through which the canal will pass consists of pine forests, many already cut over, for lumbering is a leading Florida industry. Modern iron ships using the canal will sail near more than one plantation for the production of turpentine and resin from pine trees, the "naval stores" much used in the oldtime wooden ships. Now these products go chiefly into paints, varnishes, soaps, and the like.

Leaving the Ocklawaha, the canal will cut across to the Withlacoochee, "Little Big River" of the Indians, which flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Navigable now for 60 miles by boats of shallow draft, the Withlacoochee carries cargoes of fish, oysters, farm produce and lumber down to the sea.

Happy days may be in store again for Port Inglis, at the Withlacoochee's mouth, scheduled to be the canal's gulf terminus. Port Inglis prospered in past days when large cargoes of phosphate rock moved down the Withlacoochee, but in late years the rock has been shipped east by rail, and the town has declined.

Note: Other pictures and information about Florida are contained in "Wild Life of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts," *National Geographic Magazine*, September, 1932; "Florida—The Fountain of Youth," January, 1930; "Life on a Coral Reef," January, 1927; and "Interesting Citizens of the Gulf Stream," also "Treasure-House of the Gulf Stream," January, 1921.

**Bulletin No. 2, October 21, 1935.**

*Photograph by Walter Lyman*

**SHIPS WILL SOON SAIL THROUGH FLORIDA PINE LANDS**

**The Florida Canal will bring seagoing vessels into the turpentine plantations of northern Florida. Much of the country through which the canal will be cut consists of pine forests.**

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## Balsa Wood for Quiet Living

AMERICA'S anti-noise campaign brings new fame to soundproof balsa wood. Airplane companies, pioneers in the fight against noise, line the cabins of their passenger planes with it. Factory owners insulate their heavy machinery with balsa to eliminate din and vibration. Manufacturers use it in loud speakers to bring out more clearly the low notes that are so difficult to reproduce.

Of all the woods used in commerce, balsa is the lightest. Picture a man nonchalantly balancing a log of it, two feet in diameter and 12 feet long, on his shoulder, and you get some idea of how little balsa weighs.

### Balsa Is Mostly Air

A laborer might stagger under even a small log of walnut, each cubic foot of which weighs about 57 pounds; but he could handle with one hand balsa logs 30 feet long. Although inferior balsa sometimes weighs as much as 18 pounds per cubic foot, the best balsa averages only about 7½ pounds, or about half the weight of cork.

Approximately 92 per cent of balsa wood is air. The rest consists of large, thin-walled cells containing the air. It has a spongy texture and is so soft one can dent it with his fingernail. It feels velvety and looks rather silky, resembling pine or basswood. It is white, or tinged with pale red or brown.

Although the wood weighs less than cork, it is stronger and generally less brittle. Cut from the trunk and limbs of the tree, it can be had in large, thick pieces.

Much of the balsa that finds its way to United States factories is imported from Costa Rica. There one sees the ideal tree, its smooth trunk of mottled gray and white rising tall and straight, its few limbs bearing large leaves, often 14 inches across. From a distance the tree might be mistaken for a North American cottonwood.

### Trees Not Allowed To Mature

Balsa is the "child prodigy" of the forest, growing more rapidly than almost any other tree, often shooting up 36 feet in a single year. "Easy come, easy go" seems its motto. For, untreated, it deteriorates quickly, crumbling away like a cotton fabric. It decays so completely that one seldom comes across a balsa stump in tropical forests. The logs must be shipped immediately after felling. The lumberjack who fells a tree and returns a week later to remove it will probably find his tree dry and attacked by borers, or warped by moisture and exposure.

Because the wood absorbs water readily, lumbermen customarily give it a hot paraffin bath. This adds little to the weight, but waterproofs the cells.

Although occasional balsa trees are found in primeval forests, usually they spring up in the rich earth of lowlands and foothills only after the ground has been cleared. They are raised successfully in plantations that are kept well-weeded. Weeding is essential, as young balsa trees are so tender that vines easily strangle them.

Balsa trees are seldom allowed to reach their maximum size. After about four to six years of rapid growth, they are felled, cut into logs, and hauled by oxen to railroads or mills. A few more years' growth might see them attain their full height, but as they age, their wood becomes less porous and less valuable commercially. Trees eight or ten years old are usually too heavy to find a sale.



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this spot before the War of 1812. After the British burned the Capitol in 1814, a building erected here housed Congress until the marks of the torch were erased. In Civil War times it was used as a military prison.

Note: Additional views and material about the new Supreme Court building will be found in "Wonders of the New Washington," *National Geographic Magazine*, April, 1935. For other photographs of the Nation's capital see "Winter in the Nation's Capital," February, 1935; "Washington Through the Years," November, 1931; "Approaching Washington by Tidewater Potomac," March, 1930; "Unique Gifts of Washington to the Nation," April, 1929; "The Transformation of Washington," "The Lincoln Memorial," "The Capitol, Wonder Building of the World," and "The Sources of Washington's Charm," June, 1923.

**Bulletin No. 3, October 21, 1935.**

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**THE SUPREME COURT'S PORTALS WEIGH THREE TONS**

**Cast in bronze are scenes showing the progress of human justice from ancient Greece and Rome, and England at the time of the granting of the Magna Carta, to America and the rise of the power of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall.**

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## Navarino Is Famous in Grecian History

WHERE is Navarino Bay, recent anchorage for a large part of the British Mediterranean Fleet?

Though it has no name on small-scale maps, the bay may be located by tracing along the western shore of the westernmost peninsula of southern Greece to the deepest indentation in that peninsula, facing the Ionian Sea.

Navarino Bay is sheltered from the open sea by Sphaghia Island, a rocky and barren bit of land two and one-half miles long and from 500 to 1,200 yards wide. The channel into the bay around the southern end of Sphaghia Island has depths of from 30 to 37 fathoms. The bay is almost two miles in diameter with depths varying from 15 to 25 fathoms.

### Currant Crescent of Greece

The town of Pylos, often called Navarino, containing about 2,000 inhabitants, lies on the southern side of the bay. Gialova, a small town at the northern end of the bay and Navarino are shipping points for currants produced north of the bay.

Greek currants are actually small, seedless grapes. A fertile crescent of currant vines curves around the mountains of Achaia and Elis from Corinth to Kyparissia. Currants might well be called "Corinths," for Corinth gave them their name.

Four tons of grapes, making a ton of sun- or shade-dried fruit, are grown on each of the 170,000 acres devoted to their cultivation. The training tables of ancient athletes abounded with currants, whose sugar and iron helped winners to win, and losers to lose, like men.

East of Kyparissia and north of Navarino is the mountain fortress of Ithome. From the summit of Ithome the view is magnificent. To the east the snow-topped line of Taygetus hides the city of Sparta, "where the walls were men, and every man a brick" (see illustration, next page).

### Scene of Many Naval Battles

The Peleponnesus is a battleground of the centuries, and this is not the first time that fighting ships have disturbed the waters of Navarino Bay. It was the scene more than two thousand years ago of a battle between Athenians and Spartans. The Turks took possession of the town of Navarino the same year Columbus discovered the New World and held it until 1821, except from 1644 to 1648 and 1686 to 1715, when it was held by Venetians, and in 1770 when Russians occupied it. It was recaptured by the Turks in 1825 and retained until 1827 when 24 ships of the combined British, French, and Russian fleets destroyed 89 ships of the Turks and Egyptians. This battle of Navarino Bay was one of the chief incidents leading up to the independence of Greece.

Note: For other references to Greece, ancient and modern, see "Pieces of Silver," *National Geographic Magazine*, September, 1933; "New Greece, the Centenarian, Forges Ahead," December, 1930; "Cruising to Crete," February, 1929; "Seeing 3,000 Years of History in Four Hours," December, 1928; "Seeing the World From the Air," March, 1928; "History's Greatest Trek," November, 1925; "The Glory That Was Greece," December, 1922; "The Whirlpool of the Balkans," February, 1921; "Saloniki" and "The Hoary Monasteries of Mt. Athos," September, 1916; "Greece of Today," October, 1915; and "Megaspelaeon, the Oldest Monastery in Greece" also "Greece and Montenegro," March, 1913.

**Bulletin No. 5, October 21, 1935.**

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For centuries, South American natives have made rafts of balsa logs. From this use, early Spanish colonists gave to the wood the name, "balsa," meaning raft.

Balsa rocketed into public notice during the World War when it was used in the construction of airplanes, hydroplane pontoons, and life rafts on United States transports. The 80,000 submarine floats supporting the barricade in the North Sea were made of balsa.

Uses for this remarkable wood are legion, and constantly increasing. It is made into everything from hat-molds in New York, to shoulder poles for carrying burdens in the West Indies. Designers of portable theatrical scenery hail it with delight. A tug on a rope hauls a balsa "stone wall" easily up into the flies, out of reach until the next performance. A comedian doesn't even blink when hit with a "brick" made of painted balsa.

Because of its buoyancy, balsa is much in evidence at summer resorts. It bobs on the waves in life preservers; it is built into life boats, where it serves in place of air tanks; it is fashioned into decoys and water chairs. Swimmers ride the surf on balsa aquaplanes, while children play with toy cruisers and airplanes made of balsa.

Pianos and fine furniture arrive with fewer scratches because their shipping crates are lined with a buffer of this spongy, resilient wood.

Balsa, because of its porous construction, is a natural "fireless cooker," retaining heat or cold. Packed in balsa wood packages, fish, yeast, chocolates, and other perishable products have traveled long distances without ice and have arrived fresh.

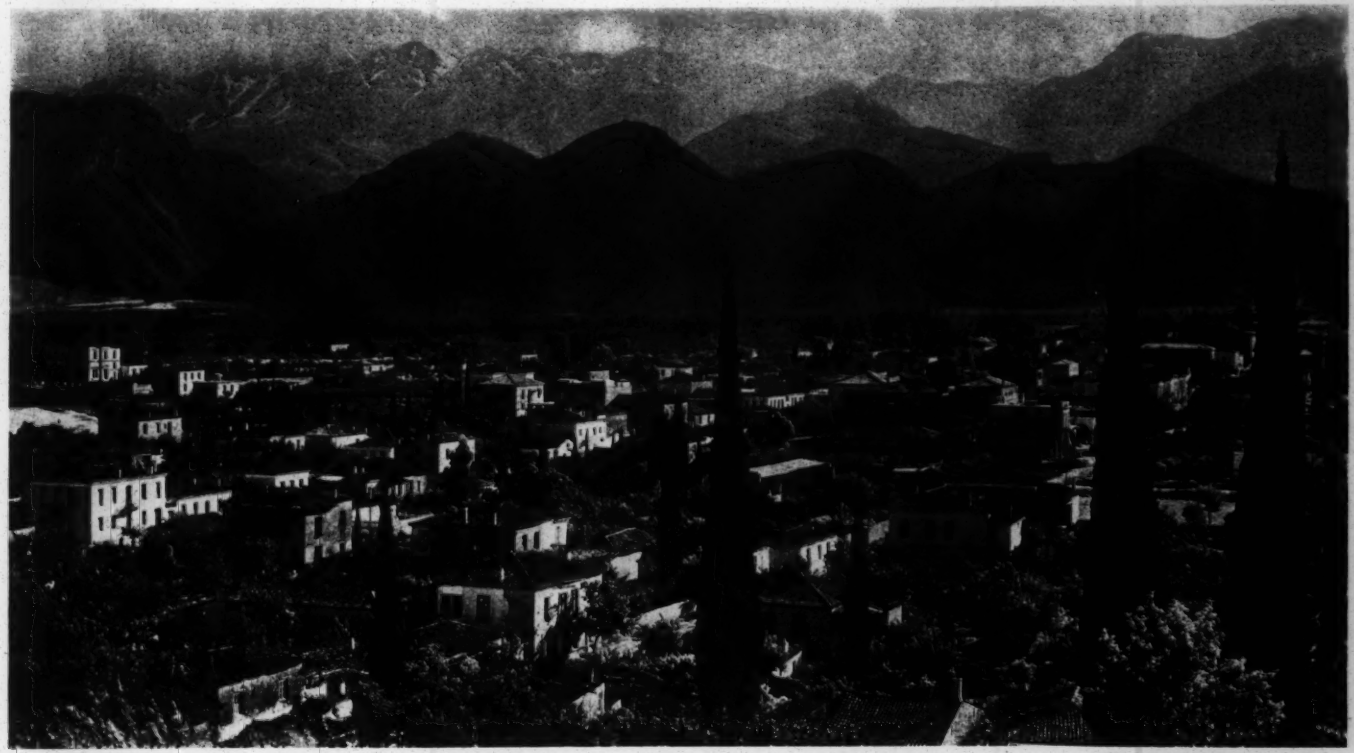
Note: For references to some of the regions where balsa is found, see: "Skypaths Through Latin America," *National Geographic Magazine*, January, 1931; "Flying the World's Longest Air-Mail Route," March, 1930; "Buenos Aires to Washington by Horse," February, 1929; "How Latin America Looks from the Air," October, 1927; "Costa Rica, Land of the Banana," February, 1922; and "Shattered Capitals of Central America," September, 1919.

**Bulletin No. 4, October 21, 1935.**

*Photograph from Acme*

**BALSA LINES THE CABINS OF MODERN PLANES**

**Passengers may eat, sleep, and talk undisturbed by the roar of motors. The present anti-noise campaign will probably result in wider use of this soundproof wood.**



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**SPARTA—ONCE THE MOST POWERFUL CITY IN GREECE**

Northeast of Navarino, where British war vessels recently assembled, is Sparta, traditional home of iron fighting men. Few ruins of the ancient capital remain, but its location on the broad plain of the Eurotas, under the foothills of Mount Taygetus, is still supreme (see Bulletin No. 5).